

April 25, 2006

National Crime Victims' Rights Week

"Victims' Rights: Strength in Unity"

United States Attorney Terrance P. Flynn presented awards in recognition of the 2006 National Crime Victims' Rights Week, April 23 - 29, 2006. Victim's Rights Week is a time for crime victims, survivors of crime victims, and service agencies to join together across America to promote victims' rights and services, and to educate our communities about the devastating impact of crime on victims, neighborhoods, schools, and our nation as a whole. The theme this year is "Victims' Rights: Strength in Unity" which pays tribute to crime victims and survivors who, for many decades, have joined together in mutual support and advocacy to promote victims' rights and services. It also recognizes the ongoing efforts of countless victim service providers, justice professionals, and law enforcement professionals and volunteers who selflessly dedicate their lives to helping victims of crime.

The United States Attorney's Office for the Western District of New York commemorated National Crime Victims' Rights Week by hosting their 7th Annual Crime Victims' Rights Awards Ceremony on Tuesday April 25, 2006. This year's award recipients were:

Thomas S. Duszkiewicz -- Assistant United States Attorney

James F. Lafferty, II -- Federal Bureau of Investigation Agent

Mary Refermat -- United States Federal Probation Officer

Joanne Beale -- Legal Assistant, United States Attorney's Office

Art Mason (Lifespan) -- Victim Advocate

Alicia Vergein & Sara Vergein -- Victim Awards

These individuals are being recognized and awarded for their hard work, dedication, and commitment to the victim assistance field.

Thomas Duszkiewicz is honored for his work as an Assistant United States Attorney assigned to prosecute a case in which the survivors of homicide victims had an interest. AUSA Duszkiewicz ensured that the survivors were always kept fully apprised of all aspects of the case. He also took affirmative steps to assist the family in attending both the trial and the sentencing. He is recognized for his exemplary effort to support those survivors.

Federal Bureau of Investigation Special Agent James Lafferty is recognized for the assistance he provided to hundreds of victims in a fraud prosecution. Special Agent Lafferty constantly maintained contact with all the victims to ensure they were kept abreast of the results of the prosecution. Furthermore, he made sure that the victims could have an opportunity to address the sentencing court. Even though this case presented complicated restitution issues in view of the number of victims, Special Agent Lafferty was successful in assisting both the court and the probation office with this completed case.

Joanne Beale, a Legal Assistant in the United States Attorney's Office, is

recognized for her dedication to her office. Ms. Beale helped train office personnel in the implementation and utilization of a case docketing system which assists with the Victim Notification System (VNS). On her own initiative, Ms. Beale developed a successful docketing system which now daily allows the United States Attorney's Office to promptly notify all victims in the federal system.

United States Probation Officer Mary Refermat is recognized for her work specifically in a case involving bank fraud, identity theft, and also elder abuse. Officer Refermat promptly counseled the victim on the court process and also the role of the Probation Department. As a result of her work with the victim, Officer Refermat was able to present an effective victim impact statement to the court to consider for the sentencing. The federal judge ultimately sentenced the defendant to the highest end of the guideline range, namely, 51 months.

Victim advocate Art Mason is also recognized for his assistance in the same case. Mr. Mason provided weekly home visits to the elderly victim, personally meeting with her every week. Since most of the fraud was conducted through the telephone, the victim was afraid to answer the phone. Mr. Mason assisted the victim by obtaining a caller I.D. with a secret telephone password. He also successfully helped the victim regain her independence and self-confidence. For example, he assisted her with opening a personal bank account and reconstructing her finances.

As stated by United States Attorney Terrance P. Flynn, "It is truly an honor to

recognize the contributions of these fine public servants for their outstanding efforts in assisting victims. Each of these awards highlight the remarkable work provided daily by our law enforcement officers, prosecutors and victim advocates. Tom Duszkiewicz, Jim Lafferty, Mary Refermat, Joanne Beale, and Art Mason truly represent the title 'public servant.'"

In addition to these federal officers, an award was also given to two private citizens, Alicia Vergein and Sara Vergein, for reporting the possession of child pornography by a male acquaintance. United States Attorney Terrance Flynn commended the courage of these women in reporting the offense to law enforcement.